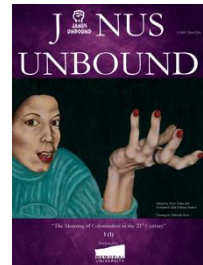


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## Resisting Ideological English: Agency and Valuing Against Reified Abstractions and Erasures

M. Véronique Switzer



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By preserving the intent of the original French title of Franz Fanon’s great work, *Les Damnés de la Terre* as *The Damned of the Earth*, Lewis Gordon makes a critical contribution beyond his already notable contribution to Fanon Studies. At the start of *What Fanon Said*, Gordon says in the notes, “The title of [*The Wretched of the Earth*] is one with which I have much disagreement, so in this book it will be referred to in its proper translation as *The Damned of the Earth*” (2015, 151). Hearing in Gordon’s point here a philosophy of translation, I will explain how the proper translation of “les damnés” as “the damned” serves our understanding of resisting ideological language such as “the wretched” or connotations of wretchedness in daily language, which erase being, agency, and the value of living beings. “The damned,” a noun born of and still a verb, connotes the active colonial *damning* as a historical process driven by culpable agents.<sup>1</sup> Put differently, “the damned” “preserves” in the meaning of the words, the reality or fact of active colonial *damning* as a historical process driven by culpable agents; it does so in naming that action is done upon peoples, who are by that fact, *colonized* peoples. Gordon thus provides remedy to the ideological consequences of the better-known translation of the title of the work that would have the reader or listener more readily call up the sense of “unfortunate or unhappy people,” which the “wretched” “translation” connotes.<sup>2</sup> I develop and defend the theoretical and socio-political centrality of Gordon rejecting “the wretched” in favor of “the damned,” preserving in translation the essential agency of those doing the damning on the condition of the damned.

The latter more widely-known “translation” of “les damnés” as “the wretched” emanates from an outsider perspective critiqued and resisted by many philosophers.<sup>3</sup> In connotations of “wretchedness,” that outsider perspective apparently “naturalizes” or makes it appear natural that some peoples, and thus people, may be wretched—those unfeelingly assumed to be in, to *be*, an abstract disconnected category—abstracted and disconnected from the agency doing the damning, from those who are agents in the process of damning. The ideological feat of apparent naturalization in turn inevitabilizes, by making the way for, the condition of “wretchedness.”

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I understand this outsider conception to exist dynamically within complex spectrums. It is characteristic of living distant from being the object of subjugation to all kinds of violence including poverty. Such outsider a-relationality is conceiving and acting as privileged.<sup>4</sup> Its values and norms may be internalized in what W.E.B. Du Bois terms “double consciousness,” where Blacks and African-Americans experience a “twoness” due to being disvalued by white-dominant values characteristic of racialized oppression (Du Bois 1903, 3). I employ Marilyn Frye’s term “whitely” to name whiteness assuming away structural racial subordination, thereby taking it as natural (Frye 1992, 160; Mills 2018). The whitely outsider conception may also be internalized by non-Blacks and non-Whites. The made-to-be/as-if-passive adjective-as-noun-name “wretched,” an ideological outsider projection, would have it that its object is abstracted from the settler-colonial relationship of blood and violence. This includes psychological, emotional, cultural and intellectual violence perpetrated upon diverse peoples by European colonizers and colonialism, and diverse and daily resistance to such. Acutely distressing are connotations of “wretchedness” from this outsider conceiving and valuing figuring in contemporary mentalities and discourses. My moral responsibility here is to call attention to their proliferation disseminated in whitely knowing spaces, appealing to Gordon’s translation analysis as a means of resisting.

Ideologies are harmful ways of valuing and conceiving, including dispositions and behaviours, ways of being, shaping, facilitating, and sustaining oppressions and their practices and institutions. As a bilingual Francophone and Anglophone who thinks about ideology, my contribution is to explain what makes Gordon’s lesson on the importance of translation true to Fanon’s philosophy critical in the contemporary English-speaking context, at least in the United States. In this paper I direct our notice to the fact that this particular outsider perspective must necessarily be facilitated by and characteristic of modern English in its so-called “mainstream” or whitely corporate and academic vernaculars. For I take as a given, respect for linguistics and appreciation that features of language are essential to culture. Though I am a not myself a linguist, I hear the importance of noticing and considering how certain features of Indigenous and Aboriginal languages differ from English. “The wretched” exemplifies existence being erased in colonial Anglo conceptual schemes. I bring to Gordon’s lesson a historically grounded philosophical account of such. The being of “human *being*,” the perception of being in conceiving “human being,” and the value of “human being” are ideologically voided. This philosophy of translation lesson is thus essential to appreciation of conceptual schemes of language that connote valuing the *being* in “human being,” and relationality in life more generally.

My purpose is an urgent call to attention to contemporary racist colonialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the form of an ideological use of language that insidiously erases agency, being, and relationality in its connotations or implications of “wretchedness.” I appeal to Ian Baucom’s work to situate us historically in the long 20<sup>th</sup> century of the Atlantic slave trade, where insurance value eradicates the value of human beings in the way it treats African peoples. I connect this to G.A. Cohen’s noticing how the existence of valuable things themselves, the being itself of valuable things, is eclipsed in contemporary “valuing,” including of human beings themselves. I bring the philosophy of *resisting* of María Lugones,

resisting “always in the gerund,” to claim that conceptions of “wretchedness” are a colonial logic of and desire for purity, a desire to be distant from “the wretched” (Lugones 2003, 208). With these I engage in the moral act of listening to Robin Wall Kimmerer’s grammar of animacy in her analysis of the contrast between *Bodéwadmimwen*, her ancestor’s language, a language indigenous to “the Americas,” and English; and to Carolyn Coleman’s research on *Gungbarlang*, an “Australian” Aboriginal language, where body parts are not grammatically expressible separable from their person, nor mothers from their children. I attempt to show that their work allows non-native speakers to appreciate how these languages stand in stark contrast to the accounting ledgers of the insurance claim adjuster (Baucom 2005, 7).

My purpose then is to target and to refuse whitely connotations of wretchedness that erase the being and agency of ethno-racially diverse peoples in language whose conceptual schemes are those of the era of the Atlantic slave trade, where insurance industry “valuing” of African persons and their bodies at their extinction makes for perpetual deadening of the very existence itself of valuable living beings once racialized, driven in part by the desire for purity, safety from wretchedness, on the part of the whitely.

As one who studies ideology, my role is to disrupt the violence of and due to this ideological erasure that passes in daily life, a self-perpetuating process of damning.

Following Gordon, Cohen, and Lugones as our philosophical guides in feeling and conceiving the vitality of being and agency in thinking, valuing, and resisting, multiple audiences are better attuned to feeling and hearing contemporary languages resisting ideological English such as Latinx and Black Lives Matter.

I offer the above with the purpose of resisting assumptions of inevitabilized “wretchedness” that figure in contemporary whitely creation and consumption of ideological discourses. This simultaneous creation and consumption can be characterized as a kind of solipsism where “the wretched” are created as abstractions and then consumed in public perceptions. In particular, I have in mind two moral crises. Institutions in the United States including those of higher learning began approaching anti-Black racism in response to anti-Black racism protests and social justice uprisings in 2020. The on-going COVID-19 pandemic gravely impacts the health and well-being, life and death of people and communities of color.

I

There is a powerful ideological tendency to containment-protecting-privilege in the contemporary context in the United States regarding new public facts about racialized oppressions manifest in this context. By “containment” here I mean an ideological tendency that preserves solipsistic race privilege of whitely classes, and workings on would-be evidence that threatens illusions. By “would-be evidence” I intend the valuing and knowledge of ethno-racially diverse peoples perceiving the whitely as such.<sup>5</sup> Evidence is pacified before it can be taken as contradictory evidence, so that it will not be perceived as evidence at all. Regarding

public facts about racialized oppressions, the manner of their presentation in statistics, for example, lends itself in the context of English-speaking, to whitely neutralization. This happens by an ideological feat of privileged “othering” perspectives as connoted in the term “the wretched” read or heard by whiteness, importing a sense of inevitability and distance from whitely responsibility. My point is not limited to the term “wretched” or “wretchedness.” It is the following. Rather than appreciating that one’s own and one’s institution’s own decision-making are the agency making the reality, there is a perpetual risk, indeed a perpetual element of creating precisely the conditions one claims to address by the ideological importation of implicit inevitability content of the kind “wretchedness” exemplifies.

Consider treatments of, and whitely perceptions of “facts” regarding phrases such as “the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Black and brown people.” By omitting the complex whitely agencies of structural racism that constitute the impact, the phrasing may import an implicit sense of the “wretchedness” of “Black and brown people” succumbing to COVID-19, naturalized and inevitabilized. Once it is from the ideological point of view an “outside fact,” the impetus to address one’s own participation in policies that impact the susceptibility of Black and brown people to COVID-19, is neutralized. For those concerned have been conceptually made distant from those exerting oppressive agency towards them. Hence, the agency making the impact on the lives, well-being, health, and deaths of ethno-racially diverse peoples, now isolated from self-awareness, self-criticism, and self-sanction, is free to operate, cloaking its self-fulfilling prophecy.

Institutional contexts that are bureaucratic and non-spontaneous, when responding to spontaneous organized social justice upheaval, will tend to mirror the very racist ideological logic they purport to aim to address. Particularly given the background context of instantaneous corporate and social media appropriation of anti-Black racism racial justice protests, this weakens resistance to whitely perceptions of connotations of naturalized and inevitabilized “wretchedness.” Academic institutions, mirroring corporate institutions, address anti-Black racism by engaging, for example, in statistical information gathering. This happens in the context of social media popularizing acronyms popular among many students where well-intentioned attempts at moral inclusivity in language are inattentive to their own simplifying ideological logic characteristic of whitely English-speaking.<sup>6</sup> The problem I want to point to is this. Both kinds of “strategy”—whether collecting statistics in the name of anti-racism, or adopting acronyms readily repeated on various social media and in spoken language—use language and methodologies characteristic of coloniality. Rather than wholly rejecting the insurance industry logic, which ultimately leaves no room for engaging relationality in extended commitments, for learning peoples’ stories, for learning and being moved by their particular experiences, ways of valuing and perceiving and being in the world, they still conform to its terms. The unquestioned methodology of statistical information gathering is inherently incapable of combatting “exclusionary inclusion,” where, for example, Latino/as are “included” in an institution by physical presence but excluded from voice and agency in shaping the values and features of that institution.<sup>7</sup> Capturing erasures of being and agency can only be accomplished through linguistic content that conveys

relationality and resisting agencies of colonized peoples, by their own voices and modes of expression and communication. Likewise, purportedly inclusive acronyms erase, for example, Hispanics and Cubanos, Guatamaltecós and Black trans identity; they erase cultural, linguistic, geographic, and myriad other place-specific ways of belonging to and with a people.<sup>8</sup>

My moral aim is to ground our attention to language usage in this contemporary colonial context, to resisting distancing and thus objectifying and pacifying the object in English.

“Latinx” is a model meaningful term and movement of resistance. “Latinx” is embracing with the “x” Indigenous languages, ancestry, and being, thereby resisting the coloniality of gender relations.<sup>9</sup> “Black” is a claim of belonging to a particular culture, language, and history.<sup>10</sup> Black Lives Matter are specifically gendered voices publicly resisting the coloniality of gender, speaking to specifically colonial agents of racialized gendered violence.<sup>11</sup> My aim here is to draw audiences in their multiplicity to attend to the need for listening against ideological noise that erases being and agency; this, in the service of echoing supporting calls for listening for agency and being, hearing such resisting.

## II

We know that the destruction of languages and cultures is not incidental to colonization. It is essential to the colonial project that peoples cease to speak languages that value life, and that they assimilate to languages that objectify it.

Linguistic context tells the conceptual and valuing difference in languages that preserve agency when speaking of the living. Robin Wall Kimmerer, an enrolled member of the Citizen Band Potawatomi, contrasts her experiences of Indigenous ways of knowing and scientific ways of knowing, demonstrating the difference a verb makes<sup>12</sup> in “Learning the Grammar of Animacy” (Kimmerer 2011). English is a noun-based language, she says, “somehow appropriate to a culture obsessed with things” (2011, 172). Hearing Kimmerer, I appreciate that modern English is fit to treating living things as objectified objects, for it fails in its conceptual value scheme to sufficiently conceive of living being as such, as *being*. Kimmerer explains, “[h]ad history been different, I would likely speak *Bo-déwadmimwen* or Potawatomi, an Anishinaabe dialect,” of which nine speakers remain, a language in which about 70% of words are verbs, as compared to English where only 30% of words are verbs (2011, 168-9). In Potawatomi “we have different ways of speaking of the living world and of the lifeless” and “all kinds of things seemed to be verbs [...] ‘to be a hill,’ ‘to be red,’ ‘to be a long sandy stretch of the beach,’ ‘to be a bay.’” Listen again: “English is a noun-based language, somehow appropriate to a culture so obsessed with things” (2011, 172-3).

Since I am a non-specialist, I simply draw the readers’ attention briefly to what non-Anglos may have appreciable experience with.<sup>13</sup> Many of the world’s languages are inflected languages, meaning that they have declensions, like Old English. By contrast, modern English is a subject-verb-object language, or a verb “medial” language where the verb must come in the middle between the subject and the object. There is no essential relationality, no subject-object relationality,



built into the grammar of modern English. There is no marking system where the subject of a verb without an object is “marked,” no structure to show the relationality of subject and object, nothing showing agreement between words in a phrase to indicate who is doing what to whom. Thus, as an analytic language rather than an inflected language, the subject-verb-object word order in English is what tells who is doing what to whom.

This linguistic feature of modern English seems to support Kimmerer’s suggestion that there is something about the preponderance of nouns in the particular context of the English language that is related to cultural obsessions with property accumulation over respect for the dignity of human and other life.<sup>14</sup> Verb final languages are common world-wide but especially common in Indigenous languages in the Americas. Hearing Kimmerer, I wonder how this relates to her noticing that in *Bodéwadmimwen* the majority of the words are verbs.

It strikes me as an interesting conjecture, or at a minimum imaginatively fruitful, to consider how the relative lack of verbs in modern English, and perhaps even the fact of being verb medial, lends itself to a property-owning subject distanced from the object, and how this may relate to the language’s development during the context of early colonial violence.<sup>15</sup> If linguists or historians have addressed this, I would be very interested to learn.<sup>16</sup>

“The wretched,” distanced from property-owning subjects, is an objectified object. It is a noun denuded of the agency of the verb “to damn” that causes the condition it connotes. As such, it reifies a detached free-floating “wretchedness” as it turns into abstraction and then nothingness, the long process of damning a people. “The wretched” as presumed “translation” of “les damnés” abstracts off of the colonial agents of damning peoples, abstracts into nothingness their agency in damning other people, creates a concept that is an abstraction from the violent relationship; hence, an ideological abstraction as double or even triple erasure process. For that abstraction permits the voiding of value, the value of living beings, from the concept of “les damnés.” How? The abstraction effected in the replacement of the verb-indicating-agency built into the noun-name “damnés” to the pacified noun “wretched,” is that “wretched” erases the cause or the condition of such a state, now made static and therefore imbued with permanence, leaving the agency void created by this erasure to be filled by the sense of inevitability, however regrettable, that some people are “wretched.”

Gordon develops our understanding of Fanon’s place as a revolutionary thinker not “a subordinated theoretical identity” ideologically “contained.” “The problem of subordinated theoretical identity is a theme against which Fanon argued. It is connected to another problem—the tendency to reduce Black intellectuals to their biographies.” This containment of Black intellectuals is effected by reducing “their thought to the thinkers they study,” or to only speaking to their biographies, to “[Black] experience.” “It is as if to say that white thinkers provide theory and Black thinkers provide *experience* for which all seek explanatory force from the former” (Gordon 2015, 5). Subordinated theoretical identity reasserts itself, I am suggesting, in the translation of “les damnés” to “the wretched.” The ideological “translation” subordinates to a pacified, derivative kind of non-existence. This is due at least in part, to the deadening effect of pacifiable noun-adjectives in English separated from verb-agency. “Wretched” does the ideological containment work on a thinker who “scratched through the

morass of banal rationalizations of political complicity and unveiled a world governed by norms of the living dead” (Gordon 2015, 2).

Subordinating the theoretical identity of Black intellectuals either to being derivative of white intellectuals or limited to the Black experience, is a form of what Lugones terms a colonial desire for and logic of purity, keeping thought pure of (Black) thought. I discuss this in Section V.

### III

I now turn our attention to thinking about English in the historical context of insurance industry erasure of existence, erasure of the being in “human being.” Historical context places our contemporary era in what Ian Baucom argues is the long 20<sup>th</sup> century of the Atlantic slave trade. It is the ideological feat of insurance industry driven “valuing” of human beings as what they are worth when they are maimed, injured, or dead that defines the contemporary conception of valuing in the Anglo whitely context. Baucom’s argument that we are in what he terms the long 20<sup>th</sup> century, not 21<sup>st</sup>, situates the kind ideological feat of pacification and of naturalization of colonial oppression in the particularity of our historical context. Our era is best characterized by the insurance industry’s development in the Atlantic slave trade where, Baucom argues, the value of living beings is eradicated and replaced by “value” at the extinguishing of their body parts and their lives. The second chapter of *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*, “‘Subject \$; or the ‘Type’ of the Modern,” shows how body parts come to have a value irrespective of whose body part they belong to, whose body part they are (Baucom 2005).

First, “value” now abstracted and detached from life, is determined at the extinction of what had value. Second, body parts are “valued” or rather classified irrespective of whose body parts they are. A language that does not have terms for living beings as verbs, Kimmerer suggests, is fit to value things over life. It is conceptually fit, ideologically fit, to containing whiteness experiencing its own violence. “Wretchedness,” I am arguing, does this. For on the white side of coloniality,<sup>17</sup> those on whom the violence is subjected have been pacified by being made noun-objects in the conceptual scheme.

Consider the very fact that in English we can conceive of body parts as distinct from those whose bodies they are, or of mothers as distinct from those to whom they are mothers. The Australian Aboriginal language of the Gunbarlang people cannot name a body “part” distinct from the person, nor a mother distinct from her children (Coleman 1982). This strikes me as a telling story about the relationship between English, colonization, and contemporary corporate imperialism. “The wretched” have been cast out of agency, made mere expendable body parts. “The wretched” becomes a trope used for the whitely to feel better about their complicity in reproducing “wretchedness,” choosing however consciously or unconsciously to conceive, think, value, and behave in “regrettable” inevitability language. Body parts are abstracted off of bodies in vocabulary. Lives are abstracted off human beings in vocabulary. “Race gaps in COVID-19 deaths.” In an economic system that trades in human beings, abstracting off respect and value for the dignity of human life, the insurance industry abstracts



off “value” as disconnected from life itself. “Value” is now literally confined to the living dead, distant solipsistic whitely being, conceiving, and valuing.

#### IV

A philosopher of ideology, G.A. Cohen centers our attention on the primacy of existence of valuable things themselves, and a bias in favor of that existing value. In “Rescuing Conservatism: A Defense of Existing Value” he defends a small-c conservatism against capitalist ideology that sells abstract or potential value while it destroys all valuable things (Cohen 2011, 211). I have argued elsewhere that the contemporary colonial valuing Cohen is resisting—in his terms, capitalist valuing—is a solipsistic “valuing” (Switzer 2023). Ideological pacification of “the wretched” to an inevitable condition is such solipsism. Cohen’s and Baucom’s arguments each diagnose what has happened to valuing: a capitalist-colonial would-be eclipsing of the whitely’s very capacity for valuing living beings. Taken together with Kimmerer’s and Gordon’s arguments, we may appreciate the deathly consequences of treating living beings in whitely conceptual schemes as other than verbs in process, as other than lived existing in particularity.

We perceive through our concepts. “The wretched” deadens the world, thingifies “the damned.” Independently of each other, Cohen appreciated and identified the same kind of ideological process of “devaluing” the concept of what he termed existing value, as Baucom. It is not only that persons are treated as violable, interchangeable, and disposable objects, which is already a moral tragedy (Nussbaum 1995, 257). Rather, Baucom and Cohen are each essentially arguing that capitalist-colonial valuing systems, “valuing” itself on the colonial side of agency, is eclipsing life. For Baucom, valuing is replaced by ideological insurance “values.” Enslaved people are “valued”/classified in terms of body parts and lives whose worth is determined by what monetary value their being extinguished costs in capitalist market terms. Value is loss. For Cohen, valuing is replaced by speculative abstraction “measuring” “possibilities,” a failure to recognize and detachment from, a bias in favor of existence, of existing value. Values, Cohen reminds us, are always *valu-ings* of *beings*. Understanding Baucom together with Cohen, we may understand that the insurance industry has disconnected valuing “on the whitely side,” from existence itself.

#### V

Finally, I appeal to decolonial feminist philosopher María Lugones’ diagnosing a “logic of purity” to explain what is at work in whitely Anglo understandings of “wretchedness”:

According to the logic of purity, the social world is both unified and fragmented, homogenous, hierarchically ordered. Each person is either fragmented, composite, or abstract and unified—not exclusive alternatives. Unification and homogeneity are related principles of ordering the social world. Unification requires a fragmented and hierarchical ordering. (Lugones 2003, 127)

To conceive a Black “other” as “wretched” or with connotations of “wretchedness” is to keep whitely perceiving essentially disconnected from human wretchedness, from the common possibility that one might be wretched too, from the situation of human wretchedness. Like the subordinated theoretical identity of Black intellectuals, such ideology is a containment mechanism for the illusion of homogeneity of whitely value and conceptual systems. It is a whitely pretending to be keeping oneself pure of the possibility of being wretched, of being connected to fragmented, composite wretchedness, of being *complicit in* creating wretchedness. The lover of purity may be facilitated, I have suggested following Kimmerer, by the preponderance of nouns not made into verbs, and, by the particular subject-verb-object non-relationality of grammatical form in English. The whitely “subject,” in this case the perceiver of the “pacified other” as “wretched,” is distanced from the object of his perception-projection. Indeed, “wretched” sets off its object as in a different realm from the “non-wretched” whose colonial agency is perpetually “pure.” The “lover of purity himself, the modern subject, the impartial reasoner,” Lugones says, is “the measure of all things” (2003, 143).

## VI

María Lugones’ decolonial feminist philosophy requires that a theory of oppression both account for the reality that resistance is possible, and the apparently contradictory reality that oppression is inevitable (Lugones 2003, 55). My appeal here, my claim that our words must capture agency, being, and the value of human beings subjected to damnation by colonialism, respects I trust, Lugones’ logic of curdling, a practice of resisting a logic of purity.<sup>18</sup>

There is a world of difference between naming a “river” as a noun as opposed to as a verb; the former makes abstract “river” (Kimmerer 2011, 173). There are different ways of naming. I have defended Gordon’s philosophy of translation as I call it, true to Fanon’s original intent in naming “les damnés” “the damned,” preserving the agency imbedded in the verb form connotation of the colonizers’ agency-in-colonizing. In the contemporary context in the United States, many whitely ways of consciousness, including aspiring anti-racists, fail to identify how expectations of those constructed as racialized others, those constructed as “wretched” or the equivalent, reproduce precisely the phenomena they may “believe” they aim to undo. The logic itself of colonial pacification of the colonized object, the voiding of being, of existence, of valuing existence, its logic of purity, can only be met with resisting with a logic of curdling, logics of contestation and multiplicity. Notice how nicknames are different from names that separate abstract body organs. Nicknames are inherently relational; in loving relationships and community they may affirm and recreate a relationality based in memory and shared experience, the act of nicknaming in relationship to understanding the other’s character, person.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal theorist and founder of Critical Race theory, developed the concept of intersectionality to address multiplicity especially before the law: the multiplicity of social forces and social identities as they intersect with ideological power. Crenshaw launched a SayHerName campaign in 2014. This

demands of us that we learn a human story about each Black woman's life who has been extinguished, and that we learn the circumstances of her experience of contemporary colonial violence (Crenshaw 2016). Black Lives Matter demands of us that we SayTheirNames. These are logics of curdling, as they require conceiving and valuing that takes commitment in time, energy, consciousness, and being against the ideological tides to the contrary. Musical artist Skipp Coon's music video "Assata Taught Me (page 181)" takes us to the embodiment of each life (Skipp Coon, nd). These are logics of curdling in requiring that we experience in feeling, in conceiving, Black experience of colonial violence in the particular stories of each of these human beings. Names connected to stories, memories, shared histories are not readily objectifiable as are people treated as informational statistics on a ledger. "Latinx" is a logic of curdling. The "x" beckons the history of coloniality of gender that is our present; the "x" beckons the being, the existence of languages indigenous to the Americas.

Baucom's cultural and literary history of the Black Atlantic takes the reader through each of the 133 enslaved people thrown overboard off the *Zong*, a British slaving ship. Baucom brings to life that each killing is an event, resisting the colonial ideological would-be illusion of a singular *Zong* incident (2005, 124-30). Colonial historian of the Black Atlantic José-Guadalupe Ortega tells students who immediately understand why, that we can only use the term "enslaved," and not the term much more familiar, a pacified noun imbued with wretchedness that whitely logics of purity have engrained in our speaking and conceiving habits.

My praxis purpose is to have us consider how dangerous it is to consume statistics and other pacified nouns regarding the persons described in ethno-racial categorizations uncritically: "Race gaps in COVID-19 deaths," "Blacks and Latinos are more likely." The saying or reading or thinking is connected to present doing, and thus to the accuracy of the claim itself, now turned self-fulfilling prediction. For the recognition is part of the action. While linguists may explain how it came to be and how it works, Gordon's translation philosophy provides a persuasive demonstration of a contemporary ideological situation, and significant reasons for us to exercise great caution in language that erases colonial relationality. We ought to resist the pressure to use statistical information about peoples' experiences of racialized oppressions, the same deathly and death-world language of insurance accounting. Resistance movements to contemporary historical processes of dehumanization, create possibilities, curdling possibilities as Lugones calls them, against the destruction of the very space, in Herbert Marcuse's sense in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), for valuing.

## Biography

M. Véronique Switzer is Associate Professor of Philosophy, Africana & Black, Latinx, and Environmental Studies, and Gender Studies Coordinator at Whittier College. She positions her work in anti-colonial resistance to ideology, and is published in *Hypatia*. She has received Irvine and other diversity grants, centering diverse voices and philosophies.

## Notes

1. I am setting aside the fact that whereas in French “les damnés” is plural, in English it must be singular.
2. I am not concerned here with the intention of the translator Constance Farrington.
3. A vast range of very important decolonial feminist work does this. Black feminist epistemology resisting logical positivist standards of knowledge is critical for appreciating erasures of agency and being of Black women knowing. See, in particular, Patricia Hill Collins (2000). Additionally, and in many tongues, María Lugones compels the reader to the importance of the “devotion (of friendship) that makes empathetic and sympathetic thinking possible,” critiquing and resisting whitely Anglo participation in ethnocentric racism understood as “a two-party affair, an interactive phenomenon” (2003, 41-51).
4. The reader will notice that I use the verb form wherever possible. I do this intentionally to connote the in-process agency that is the subject of the paper. I am resisting in my use of language, the strain it puts on English to do so.
5. See Lugones’ discussion of resisting arrogant knowing in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, pp. 55-58.
6. I allude to these two kinds of examples only in general terms to avoid getting lost in their logic.
7. See Rocco (2014).
8. See Snorton (2017) with thanks to Arlo Sandoval, Whittier College 2022 Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow, whose research pointed me to this text.
9. For philosophical analyses of the coloniality of gender see Oyěwùmí (1997) and Lugones (2020). For historical analyses of the coloniality of gender see Sigal (2020).
10. For analysis of belonging to a particular African ethnic identity, *Carabali-Oru*, and the use of historical memory in the Americas to reestablish cultural connections, see José-Guadalupe Ortega (2014). For analysis of Black Americans’ accumulated folk knowledge in leveraging cultural memory, see Kazembe (2018), and for a philosophical argument that “one of the roles of black philosophy is to demonstrate radical love for black people by performing acts of inheritance of theoretical production created and maintained by black peoples,” see Dotson, (2013): 38-45.
11. See Angela Flournoy’s interview with Melina Abdullah on Black Lives Matter, womanist mothering, and abolition (2021) and Abdullah (2012).
12. The original “what a difference a day makes” is a translation of Mexican composer María Grever’s “Cuando vuelva a tu lado,” popularized in English by Dinah Washington.
13. It is to my linguist friend Galust Madrussian, Los Angeles City College retired faculty, that I owe much of the discussion of linguistics.
14. Galust Madrussian explains to me that Persian seems to have only nouns, but nouns that may commonly be changed to verbs. I do not think we need to interpret Kimmerer as offering a general account of languages with a high proportion of nouns. Rather, I interpret her point to refer to English where nouns do not connote animacy. That is, I interpret Kimmerer as making a claim particular to English.
15. Notice for example, that George Orwell’s analysis of the degradation of English due to political context identifies a tendency away from simple verbs; he advises choosing the active always over the passive voice. See Orwell (1946).
16. For a related discussion, see Motha (2020).
17. I borrow and honor María Lugones’ language here.

18. See Lugones, “Purity, Impurity, and Separation” in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, 2003: 121-148.

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